

## [E. E. Steen]

1

Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas. Tales-Personal Anecdote

### RANGE-LORE

E. E. Steen of Sonora, Texas, came from DeWitt to Sutton County when a youth of nineteen. He engaged in the ranching business with his father when only a lad and made the change to Sutton County because of his interest in sheep. He relates his ranching experience as follows:

"When I was a boy back in DeWitt County it seemed that I was always the one selected to go up the trail. I don't know if I was considered unusually good or not but I was always willing and ready to go and enjoyed everything, hard times and all.

"I never knew of anything that would set off a bunch of cattle on a stampede like a polecat. C12 - Texas 2 About the hardest and longest drive I ever made was due to one of these boogers getting into a herd of 2,000 cattle. We were on a drive from Live Oak County to San Antonio, Texas. We had finished with supper, the riders had gone on duty and the cattle were grazing around as quietly as I ever saw them, when all of a sudden, whew! we began to sniff and the cattle began to snort and they were gone. Like a thunderstorm they roared over hills and valleys, every cowboy doing his best to stop them. Not a man slept that night, nor the next. We ran those wild things five days and nights. I slept about four hours in that time and it rained constantly. I have always thought of that as my worst experience on the range. This singin' to cattle that you hear so much about was as much

## Library of Congress

to keep awake as to quiet the cattle; however, I do think that cattle have nerves just like folks and that the right kind of music is just as quieting to them. You will hear a lot of different tales about this, though, and I guess most of them are partly right as this was really done for several reasons and had more than one result. Keepin' location was one of the best reasons, so one cowboy would not over-ride another and keeping up some constant sound or noise so any other sudden noise would not be such a shock was one of the many very good reasons for singin'.

"Some of our hardest drives were made at night. We 3 would hold the cattle on the grass in daytime and get what sleep we could, then start out again that night.

"The wild Indians were about all gone by this time. There were several reservations around and they were not as civilized as some would think. Every time we went near one of these the Indians would always demand something. A beef, a horse or a blanket usually satisfied them.

"There were plenty of bear, antelope and deer, so we never lacked for meat.

"We had a tenderfoot come into camp once and he wanted more than anything else to kill a bear. That was all he talked about, so a dev'lish fellow and I got together and planned to take him a-huntin'. Just any way to play a prank on a feller was part of our daily duty. We had an old gun in camps that would purty nigh change ends with a guy every time he shot it. It was kept back for the new-comers. We got old Betsy out, rigged her up and gave her to Ben. 'That's the bear gun, Ben, you never miss with her', said my partner. 'Just hold 'er on the bear, pull the trigger and the game is yours.' 'Fine, fine', said the stranger, 'I shore can do that.' Sam looked at me and winked. We were not to be disappointed. Pretty soon we saw an old bear standin' under a big bluff, lookin' just like he had parked there especially for Ben to practice on. 'There he is, Ben', I said. He was so excited I don't think he ever got the gun to his shoulder 4 before he fired. It kicked him in the chest and knocked the breath out of him and over he went. Of course the shot went wild and the bear

## Library of Congress

ran off. Ben was much more concerned over the loss of the bear than his own injuries. He took it all so good naturedly though, that when we got over our big hurrah we said that we would see that he got a bear. We helped him learn until he got to be a good hunter and killed many bear. He never failed to get a big kick out of every one he ever killed.

“One of the best of pranks was to run through camps shaking a saddle after a new-comer had gone to sleep. He always thought a wild horse was running over him.

“ Nope, I never saw a woman cook in a cow camp but have seen quite a few women ride and rope, especially in Coleman County. I know a Mrs. Morris there, who was the best woman rider I ever saw. She could ride anything, just like a cowboy. I always wanted to see her try to ride an old grey Mexican horse. He was the meanest devil I ever saw, grey with a black stripe right down his back, just as plain as the stripe down a skunk's back. His mane and tail were black and I thought he was the prettiest thing I ever saw. I never saw him rode but once. A seventeen year old negro boy named Lon McKnight was the best rider I ever knew and he would ride the old gray horse until he pitched himself down, then it would be the same thing over again the next time he tried him. I saw the negro after he was twenty-five years old and he told 5 me he had never found a horse that could throw him. He was as good a rider as Spear Hudson was a shooter. Spear was a dandy. I have seen him take a six shooter, turn two birds loose at once and kill them both.

“When the sheep men started coming into the cattle country their worst problem was water. The cowman did not want to share his water and grass. I have hauled water in barrels from creeks, wells, rivers or anywhere I could get it. That was our only way of keeping our sheep alive until we came into our rights and bought and owned our own land.

“I would have been working right on with my sheep now, I guess, if I had not got so crippled up with this “rheumatiz”. I was about 75 then and sort of had to take out.

## Library of Congress

"I've just had this new brick house finished here and hope I can spend the balance of my days in a little comfort."